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LESSONS FROM A SHOEMAKER'S  
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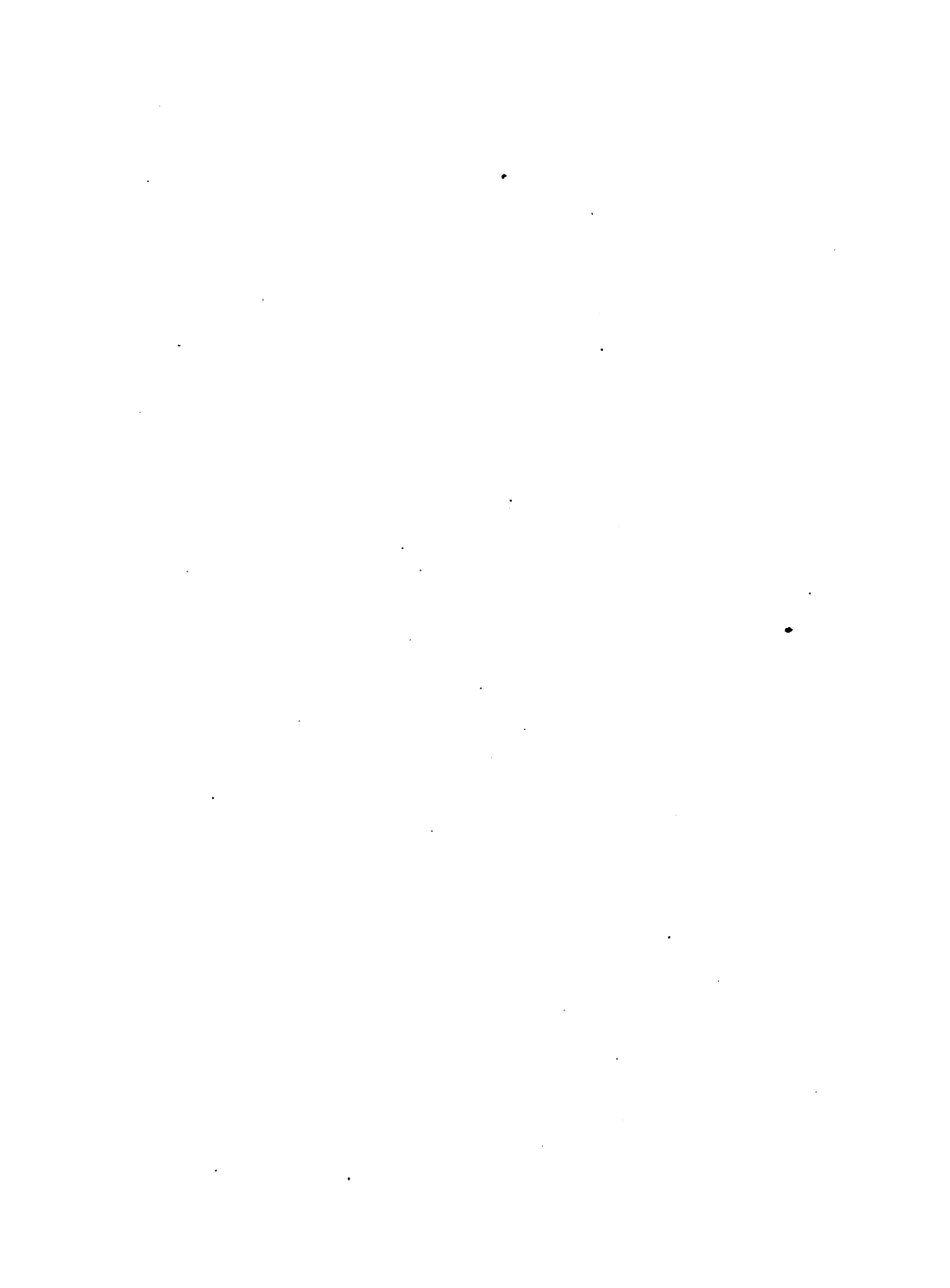


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# LESSONS FROM A SHOEMAKER'S STOOL

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BY JOHN KERR

H. M. INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS



ALEXANDER STRAHAN, PUBLISHER

148 STRAND, LONDON

1865

*Reprinted from "Good Words."*

## LESSONS FROM A SHOEMAKER'S STOOL.

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IN the course of my wanderings I had the good luck not long ago to fall in with a very remarkable and interesting old man, James Beattie, of Gordonstone, a village of about a dozen of houses, in the parish of Auchterless, in the north-east corner of Aberdeenshire. He is a shoemaker, but has conjoined with his trade the teaching of all the children in his neighbourhood. It is remarkable how largely the shoemaking profession bulks in the public eye in this respect. John Pounds, the Portsmouth cobbler, was the founder of Ragged Schools in England; and George Murray of Peterhead, also a shoemaker, formed the nucleus from which the Union Industrial Schools of that town have sprung. Many others might be mentioned. Probably scientific investigation may hereafter explain this affinity between leather and philanthropy.

Mr Beattie is now eighty-two years of age. For sixty

of these he has been carrying on his labour of love, and ne means to do so as long as he can point an awl or a moral, adorn a tale or a piece of calf-skin. He has sought no reward but that of a good conscience. None are better worthy of a recognition in *Good Words* than the systematic unobtrusive doer of good deeds, and probably few will grudge James Beattie the honour.

While in his neighbourhood a friend of mine gave me such an account of him as made me resolve to see him if possible. By making a start an hour earlier than was necessary for my regular duty, I had no difficulty in making out my visit to him. His workshop being pointed out to me—a humble one-storied house with a thatch roof, and situated in quite a rural district—I went up to the door and knocked.

I hope the three hundred and odd school-managers, with whom I am acquainted in the north of Scotland, will excuse me for saying here, that this ceremony—the knocking—ought always to be gone through on entering a school. It is not perhaps too much to say that, so far as I have observed, it is almost invariably neglected. The door is opened, and an unceremonious entrance is made, by which not only is the teacher made to feel—know he feels it—that he is not the most important person there, which is not good; *but the pupils are made to see it*, which is very bad. I am aware that this is sometimes due to the fact that the teacher and managers; on the most familiar terms. It is not always so; *even when it is*, I venture to think that the courtesy

knock should be observed. I have never once, when I was alone, or when it depended on me, entered a school without knocking. This, however, by the way.

I had got the length of knocking at James Beattie's door, which was almost immediately opened by a stout-built man under the middle size, with a thoroughly Scotch face, square, well-marked features, eyes small and deeply sunk, but full of intelligence and kindliness. The eyes, without having anything about them peculiarly striking, had a great deal of that quiet power for which I cannot find a better epithet than sympathetic. They are eyes that beget trust and confidence, that tempt you somehow to talk, that assure you that their owner will say nothing silly or for show; in short, good, sensible, kindly eyes. His age and leathern apron left me in no doubt as to who he was. I said, however, "You are Mr Beattie, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replied, "my name's James Beattie. Wull ye no come in oot o' the snaw? It's a stormy day."

"Perhaps," I said, "when you know who I am, you won't let me in."

"Weel, at present I dinna ken ony reason for keepin' ye oot."

I then told him who I was; that I was on my way to Auchterless Female School, (about two miles off,) that his friend Mr C—— had been speaking to me about him, and that, as I was almost passing his door, I could not resist calling upon him, and having a friendly chat with one who had been so long connected with educa-



tion. I added that I did not wish to see his school unless he liked, and that if he had any objections he was to say so.

"Objections!" he replied. "I never hae any objections to see onybody that has to do wi' education. It has aye been a hobby o' mine, and I daursay a body may hae a waur hobby. You that's seein' sae mony schules will be able to tell me something I dinna ken. Come in, sir."

In his manner there was no fussiness, but a most pleasing solidity, heartiness, and self-possession. He did not feel that he was being made a lion of, and he evidently did not care whether he was or no. I went in, and, as a preliminary to good fellowship, asked him for a pinch of snuff, in which I saw he indulged. The house, which does double duty as a shoemaker's stall and school-room, is not of a very promising aspect. The furniture consists of a number of rude forms and a desk along the wall. So much for the school-room. In the other end are four shoemakers' stools occupied by their owners, lasts, straps, lap-stones, hammers, old shoes, and the other accompaniments of a shoemaker's shop. Two or three farm servants, whose work had been stopped by the snow-storm, had come in, either to pass an idle hour in talk or in the way of business.

There were only ten pupils present, a number being prevented by the snow and long roads. When I went in some of them were conning over their lessons in a *voice* midway between speech and silence, and one

or two were talking, having taken advantage of the "maister's" going to the door to speak to me, and the noise called forth from Mr Beattie the order, "Tak' your bookies, and sit peaceable and dacent, though there's few o' ye this snawy day. Think it a', dinna speak oot; your neebours hear ye, and dinna mind their ain lessons."

This is, I think, very good: "Although there's few o' ye this snawy day," your responsibility is individual, not collective. Many or few, the object for which you are here is the same—viz., to learn your lessons and behave properly. The snow-storm has kept many away, but it furnishes no excuse for noise or idleness. The old man's "though there's few o' ye" thus involved a great principle that lies at the root of all true teaching.

The order was obeyed to the letter. James pointed out a seat for me on one of the forms, took up his position on his stool, and he and I began to talk. I am tempted to give it, to the best of my recollection, in his simple Doric, which would lose much by translation.

"You will not be very well pleased," I remarked, by way of drawing him out, "about this fine new school which has just been opened at Badenscoth. It will take away a great many of your scholars."

"Oh, man!" he replied, "ye dinna ken me, or ye wudna say that. I hae just said a hunder times, when I heard o' the new schule, that I was thankfu' to Providence. Afore there was ony talk o' the new schule, I hae stood mony a time wi' my back to the fire lookin' at

the bairnies when they were learnin' their lessons, and whiles takin' a bit glint up at my face,—for I think some o' them like me,—and I've said, 'Oh, wha'll mind thae puir creaturs when I'm awa'?' Ye ken," he continued, "I canna expect muckle langer time here noo. Ay, even if I werena an auld dune man, as I am, I wud hae been thankfu' for the new schule. 'I hae maybe dune as weel's I could, but a' my teachin', though it's better than nae-thing, is no to be compared wi' what they'll get at a richt schule."

"It is quite true," I said, "that you labour under great disadvantages, having both to teach and attend to your work at the same time."

"Weel, it's no sae muckle that, as my ain want o' education."

"You have had a long education," I replied.

"That's just what a freen o' mine said to me ance, and I mind I said to him, 'That's the truest word ever ye spak. I've been learnin' a' my days, and I'm as fond to learn as ever.'"

"But how do you manage to teach and work at the same time?"

"Ye see," he replied, "when I'm teachin' the A B C, I canna work, for I maun point to the letters; but when they get the length o' readin', I ken fine by the sense, withoot the book, if they're readin' richt, and they canna mak' a mistak' but I ken 't."

Well said by James Beattie! He has discovered, by



common sense and experience, the only true test of good reading, "by the sense, without the book."

"In spite of your own want of education, however," I said, "I understand that you have old pupils in almost every quarter of the globe who are doing well, and have made their way in the world through what you were able to give them. I have heard, too, that some of them are clergymen."

"Ay, that's true enough," he replied; "and some o' them hae come back after being years awa', and sat doon among the auld shoon there whar they used to sit. And I've got letters frae some o' them, after ganging a far way, that were just sae fu' o' kindness and gude feelin', and brocht back the auld times sae keenly, that I micht maybe glance ower them, but I couldna read them oot. Ah, sir! a teacher and an auld scholar, if they're baith richt at the heart, are buckled close thegither, though the sea's atween them. At onyrate, that's my experience.

"See, sir," he continued, holding out a point of deer's horn, "there's a' I hae o' a remembrance o' ane that's in Canada, a prosperous man noo, wi' a great farm o' his ain. When he was at the schule here, he saw me makin' holes wider wi' a bit pointed stick, and he thocht this bit horn wud do't better,—and he wasna far wrang,—and he gied it to me. Weel, he cam' back years and years after, and I didna ken him at first. He had grown up frae being a bairn, no muckle bigger than my knee, to be a buirdly chield. I sune made oot who he was; and as I

was workin' and talkin' to him, I had occasion to use this bit horn. 'Gude hae me,' says he, 'hae ye that yet?' 'Ay,' said I, 'and I'll keep it as lang as I hae a hole to bore.'"

Returning to the subject of teaching, I said, "How do you manage after they have got the alphabet, and what books do you use?"

"Weel, I begin them wi' wee penny bookies; but it's no lang till they can mak' something o' the Testament; and when they can do that, I choose easy bits oot o' baith the Auld and New Testaments that teach us our duty to God and man. I dinna say that it's maybe the best lesson-book; but it's a book they a' hae, and ane they should a' read, whether they hae ither books or no. They hae 'collections' too, and I get them pamphlets and story-books; and when I see them gettin' tired o' their lessons, and beginning to tak' a look about the house, I bid them put by their 'collections,' and tak' their pamphlets and story-books. Ye ken, bairns maun like their books."

Well said again! "Bairns maun like their books,"—a necessity far from universally recognised, either by teachers or the makers of school-books. Many a healthy plant has been killed by being transplanted into an ungenial soil, and kept there; and many a promising school career has been marred or cut short by books that "bairns couldna like."

"You teach writing, arithmetic, and geography, too, I suppose, Mr Beattie?"

"I try to teach writin' and geography; but ye'll believe that my writin's naething to brag o', when I tell ye that I learnt it a' mysel'; ay, and when I began to mak' figures, I had to tak' doon the Testament, and look at the 10th verse, to see whether the o or the 1 cam first in 10. I can learn them to write a letter that can be read, and, ye ken, country folk's no very particular aboot its being like copperplate. Spellin's the main thing. It doesna mak' (matter) if a bairn can write like a clerk, if he canna spell. I can learn them geography far enough to understan' what they read in the newspapers; and if they need mair o't than I can gie them, and hae a mind for't, they can learn it for themsel's. I dinna teach countin'. Ony man in my humble way can do a' that on his tongue. At onyrate, I've aye been able. Besides, I couldna teach them countin'. Ye see, I maun live by my wark, and I'm thankfu' to say I've aye been able to do that; but I couldna do't if I was to teach them countin'. It wud mak' sic an awfu' break in my time. When my ain grandchildren hae got a' I can gie them, I just send them to ither schules."

"What catechism do you teach?" I asked.

"Ony ane they like to bring," he replied. "I'm an Episcopalian mysel'; but I hae lived lang enough to ken, and, indeed, I wasna very auld afore I thocht I saw that a body's religious profession was likely to be the same as his faither's afore him; and so I just gie everybody the same liberty I tak' to mysel'. I hae Established Kirk, and Free Kirk, and Episcopal

bairns, and they're a' alike to me. D'ye no think I'm richt?"

"Quite right, I have no doubt. The three bodies you mention have far more points of agreement than of difference, and there is enough of common ground to enable you to do your duty by them without offending the mind of the most sensitive parent. I wish your opinions were more common than they are."

During the conversation, the old man worked while he talked. He had evidently acquired the habit of doing two things at once.

"I should like very much," I said, "to see some of your teaching. Will you let me hear how your pupils get on?"

"I'll do that wi' pleasure, sir," he replied; "but ye maun excuse oor auld-fashioned tongue."

He took off his spectacles, and laid aside his work, I presume out of deference to a stranger; and was about to call up some of his scholars, when I requested him not to mind me, and said that I should prefer to see him go on in his ordinary way.

"Weel, weel, sir, ony way ye like; but I thocht it was barely decent to gang on cobblin' awa' when ye were examinin' the bairns."

He accordingly resumed his spectacles and his work, adjusted his woollen nightcap or cowl, striped with red, white, and black,—an article of common wear by day among people of his age and occupation,—and, looking

round, said, "Come here, Bell, and read to this gentleman."

This remark was addressed to a little girl about eight years of age. Bell came up when called.

"She has a dreadfu' memory, sir! I weel believe it wud tak' her an hour and a half to say a' she has by heart."

Bell read fluently and intelligently, spelt correctly, and afterwards repeated a whole chapter of Job with scarcely a stumble, and so as to convince me that she really had a "dreadfu' memory." Her answers to several questions proposed by myself were wonderfully mature. I have seldom seen a child whose solidity of intellect and thoughtfulness struck me more than that of Bell M'Kenzie.

"Come here noo, Jamie," he said, addressing a very little boy, "and if ye read weel, or at ony rate *as weel's ye can do*, to this gentleman, ye'll get a sweetie; but if ye dinna, ye'll get naething."

What a world of kindness and consideration there is in these five little words, "as weel's ye can do," even as they appear on paper! It was a *strict*, but not a *hard* bargain. I daresay the modification, "as weel's ye can do," was suggested by Jamie's very tender age: he was just three. Less than "weel" would earn the sweetie; but it must be *as weel's he can do*. The test was, as it should always be in such cases, a relative one. In order, however, to apprehend the full effect of the modifying



words, it is necessary to hear the tone of the old man's voice, to see the gentle pat on Jamie's back with which they were accompanied, and the childlike confidence with which the little urchin of three years came up to the old man of nearly eighty-three, and, resting his arm on the apron-covered knee, began to spell out his lesson, having first assured himself, by an inquiring look into the "maister's" face, that the stranger meant him no harm. The awl was used as a pointer, and Jamie did at first pretty well,—for his age, I thought, wonderfully well, but to the old shoemaker's mind, "no sae wêel's he could do," and he had to give place to another boy. He did so, but the tears came into his little eyes, and remained there till he was taken on a second trial, and reinstated in favour. He earned and got his sweetie; that was a good thing. He had pleased the "maister," and was no longer in disgrace; that was evidently a far better thing.

The Bible class was then called up.

"That creatur' there, Jean," he said, putting his hand on a little girl's head, and looking kindly in her face, "is a gude scholar, though she's but sma'."

Jean, reassured by the remark, and prepared for the ordeal, gave a smile, and commenced reading the 26th chapter of Numbers. It was difficult, and even Jean halted now and then as a proper name of more than ordinary difficulty came in her way.

"I doot it's a hard bit that, Jean," he said; "is't a' names?"

"Na, nae't a'," she replied, with an emphasis on the *a'*, which left it to be inferred that a good part of it was names.

"Weel, do the best ye can; spell them oot when ye canna read them. Come here, Jessie," he said, addressing the biggest girl present, probably eleven years of age, "and see if they spell them richt." Turning to me, he said, "I'm no sae fond o' chapters fu' o' names as o' them that teach us our duty to God and ane anither; but it does them nae harm to be brocht face to face wi' a difficulty noo and then. It wad tak' the speerit oot o' the best horse that ever was foaled to mak' it draw aye up-hill. But a chapter like that maks them try themsel's in puttin' letters thegither, and naming big words. I daursay ye'll agree wi' me, that to battle wi' a difficulty and beat it is a gude thing for us a', if it doesna come ower often."

"I quite agree with you," I replied.

"Weel, when it's a namey chapter like that, I get my assistant,"—(with a humorous twinkle of his eye,)—"that bit lassie's my assistant—to look ower't, and see if they spell't richt. I couldna be sure o' the spellin' o' the names withoot the book."

After the Bible lesson, and as a supplement to it, Jessie, the assistant, was ordered to ask the Shorter Catechism. She ranged pretty nearly over it all, and received, on the whole, surprisingly correct answers. Meantime the old man went steadily on with his shoe, all eye for his work, all ear for blunders. Once he

heard one girl whispering assistance to another, which he promptly and almost severely checked by—"Dinna tell her; there's nae waur plan than that. If she needs help, I'll tell her mysel', or bid you tell her."

A boy who stumbled indifferently through an answer was punished with "Ay, ye're no very clear upon that, lad. Try't again. I doot ye haena stressed your e'en wi' that ane last nicht." He tried it again, but with not much better success. "Oh, tak' care! ye're no thinkin'. If ye dinna think o' the meanin', hoo can ye be richt? Ye might as weel learn Gaelic."

After several other correct answers, I had a very good example of the quickness of perception which long experience gives. A little girl having broken down, opened the catechism which she held in her hand, and craftily began reading instead of repeating the answer. The shoemaker's ear at once caught it up. He detected from the accuracy of the answer, and at the same time from the hesitating tone in which it was given, the effort of reading, and said, in a voice of considerable severity, "What! are ye keekin'? Hae ye your catechiss in your han'? Hoo often hae I telt ye o' the dishonesty o' that? Ye're cheatin', or at ony rate ye're tryin' to cheat me. Do I deserve that frae ye? Did I ever cheat you? But ye're doing far waur than cheatin' me. Oh, whatever ye do, be honest. Come to the schule wi' your lessons weel by heart if you can; but if you've been lazy, dinna mak' your faut waur by being dishonest."

*It will be seen from this sketch of his teaching that*

Mr Beattie is a man of no ordinary type. I have succeeded very imperfectly in conveying an adequate notion of his kindness and sympathy with everything good. I was surprised to find in a man moving in a very narrow circle such advanced and well-matured theories of education. His idea of the extent to which difficulties should be presented in the work of instruction,—his plan of selecting passages instead of taking whatever comes to hand,—his objection to whispering assistance, “Dinna tell her; if she needs help, I’ll tell her mysel’, or bid you tell her,”—his severe but dignified reproof of dishonesty, “Ye’re cheatin’ me, but ye’re doing far waur than that. Oh, whatever ye do, be honest!” &c.,—his encouragement to thoughtfulness and intelligence, “If ye dinna think o’ the meanin’, hoo can ye be richt?” seemed to me most admirable, well worthy the attention of all who are engaged in similar pursuits, and certainly very remarkable as being the views of a man who has mixed little with the world, and gained almost nothing from the theories of others.

It was evident from the behaviour of the children that they all fear, respect, and love him.

I sat and talked with him on various subjects for a short time longer, and then rose to bid him good-bye.

“But, sir,” he remarked, “this is a cauld day, and, if ye’re no a teetotaller, ye’ll maybe no object to gang up to my house wi’ me and ‘taste something?’”

I replied that I was not a teetotaller, and should be



very glad to go with him. We went accordingly, "tasted something," and had a long talk.

He has, for a country shoemaker, a remarkably good library. The books generally are solid, some of them rare, and he seems to have made a good use of them. His opinion of novels is perhaps worth quoting :—

"I never read a novel a' my days. I've heard bits o' Scott read that I likit very weel, but I never read ony o' them mysel'. The bits I heard telt me some things that were worth kennin', and were amusin' into the bargain ; but I understan' that's no the case wi' the maist o' novels. When a body begins to read them, he canna stop, and when he has dune, he kens nae mair than when he began. Noo it taks me a' my time to read what's really worth kennin'."

I asked him what had first made him think of teaching.

"Mony a time," he replied, "hae I asked that at mysel' ; and it's nae wonner, for I never was at the schule but eleven weeks in my life, and that was when I was a loon (laddie) about eleven years auld. I had far mair need to learn than to teach, though I'm no sure but to teach a thing is the best way to learn't. Amaist a' that I ken, and it's no muckle to be sure, I got it by learning ithers. But ye've asked what made me begin teachin' ? Weel, sir, it was this : When I was a young lad, there were seven grown-up folk roun' aboot here that couldna read a word. Some o' them were married *and had families*, and there was nae schule nearer than



tw a mile, and in the winter especially the young things couldna gang sae far. Ane o' the fathers said to me ae day : 'Ye ken, Jamie, I canna read mysel', but, oh man, I ken the want o't, and I canna thole that Willie shouldna learn. Jamie, ye maun tak' and teach him.' 'Oh man, I said, 'hoo can I teach him? I ken naething mysel'.' 'Ye maun try,' he said. Well, I took him, and after him anither and anither cam, and it wasna lang till I had about twenty. In a year or twa I had between sixty and seventy, and sae I hae keepit on for near sixty years. I soon grew used wi't, and custom, ye ken, is a kind o' second nature."

"But how did you find room," I asked, "for sixty in that little place?"

"Weel, sir, there was room for mair than ye wud think. Wherever there was a place that a creatur could sit, I got a stoolie made, and every corner was filled. Some were at my back, some were in the corner o' the window, and some were sittin' among the auld shoon at my feet. But for a' that there wasna room for sixty; and so a woman that lived across the road had a spare corner in her house, and when the bairns got their lessons, they gaed ower and sat wi' her, and made room for the ithers. Ye see, the faithers and mithers were aye in gude neebourhood wi' me. They were pleased and I was pleased, and when folk work into ane anither's han's, they put up wi' things that they wudna thole at ither times."

"You must have had great difficulty," I remarked,

"in keeping so many of them in order. What kind of punishment did you use?"

"Oh, sir, just the strap. Ye might hae seen it lying among the old shoes."

"And did you need to use it often?"

"Ou ay, mony a time, when they were obstinate. But I maun say, it was when the schule was sae close packit that I had to use 't maist. When they were sittin' just as close as I could pack them, some tricky nackits o' things wud put their feet below the seats, and kick them that were sittin' afore them. Order, ye ken, maun be keepit up, and I couldna pass by sic behaviour. I've seldom needit to chasteese them for their lessons," he continued; "the maist o' them are keen to learn, and gie me little trouble."

"Have you any idea," I asked, "of the number of pupils you have passed through your hands during these sixty years?"

"Weel, I keepit nae catalogue o' names, but some o' them that tak' an interest in the bairns made oot that they canna be less than fourteen or fifteen hunder. I weel believe they're richt."

"And you have never charged any fees, I understand?"

"Fees! Hoo could I charge fees? I never sought, and I never wanted a sixpence. But I maun say this, that the neebours hae been very kind, for they offered to work my bit croft for me, and it wudna hae been dacent to refuse their kindness. And they gied me a beautiful

silver snuff-box in 1835. That's it," he said, taking it out of his pocket; "wull ye no tak' anither pinch?"

I did, and then said that I was glad to learn from his friend Mr C—— that, a year or so ago, he had been presented with his portrait and a handsome purse of money.

"Deed it's quite true, and I was fairly affronted when they gied me my portrait and £86, and laudit me in a' the papers. Some o't cam frae Canada and ither foreign pairts; but I ken't naething aboot the siller till they gied it to me, for they cam ower me, and got me to tell them, without thinking o't, where some o' my auld scholars were livin'. I said to mysel' when I got it, that I was thankfu' for't, for I wud be able noo to buy the pair things books wi't."

"You supply them with books then?" I inquired.

"Weel, them that's no able to buy them," he said, with a peculiar smile.

I have not succeeded in analysing this smile to my own satisfaction, but, among other things, it expressed commiseration for the poverty of those who were not able to buy books, and a deprecating reproof of himself for having been unwittingly betrayed into an apparent vaunting of his own good deeds.

"You must have great pleasure," I said, "in looking back to the last sixty years, and counting up how many of your old scholars have done you credit."

"Oh, I hae that!" he replied. "I've dune what I could, and there's nae better work than learnin' young."



things to read, and ken their duty to God and man. If it was to begin again, I dinna think I could do mair, or at onyrate mair earnestly, for education than I hae dune ; but I could maybe do't better noo. But it's a dreadfu' heartbreak when ony o' them turns oot ill, after a' my puir wark to instil gude into them."

I led him by degrees to take a retrospect of the last half century. He told me, in his simple, unaffected Doric, the history of some of his pupils, keeping himself in the background, except where his coming forward was necessary either to complete the story, or put in a stronger light the good qualities of some of his old scholars. He paused now and then, sometimes with his hands on his knees, and his head slightly lowered, sometimes with his head a little to one side, and his eye looking back into the far-off years, and I saw, by his quiet, reflective look, that he was scanning the fruits of his labours, his expression varying from gaiety to gloom, as the career of a successful or "ne'er-do-weel" pupil passed in review before him.

I complimented him on his haleness for his years.

"Yes," he replied, "I should be thankfu', and I try to be't; but, I'm feared, no sae thankfu' as I should be. Except hearing and memory, I hae my faculties as weel's when I was ten year auld. Eh! what a mercy! hoo many are laid helpless on their back long afore they're my age, and hoo few are aboon the ground that are sae auld!"

Here the old man's voice faltered, and tears of genuine gratitude filled his eyes.

“Of a’ them that began life wi’ me, I just ken ane that’s no ta’en awa’. There were twelve brithers and sisters o’ us, and I’m the only ane that’s left. My faither dee’d when I was sixteen. My aulder brithers were a’ oot at service; and as I was the only ane that was brocht up to my faither’s trade, my mither and the younger anes had to depend maistly on me; and I thocht I was a broken reed to depend on, for I hadna mair than half-learned my trade when my faither dee’d. I mind the first pair o’ shoon I made; when I hung them up on the pin, I said to mysel’, ‘Weel, the leather was worth mair afore I put a steek (stich) in’t.’ Ye ken they werena sae particular then as they are noo. If the shoe didna hurt the foot, and could be worn at a’, they werena very nice aboot the set o’t. Mony a time I thocht I wud hae lost heart, but regard for my mither keepit me frae despairin’. Whiles I was for ownin’ beat, and askin’ the rest to help us; but my mither said, ‘Na, Jamie, my man, we’ll just work awa’ as weel’s we can, and no let the rest ken.’ Weel, I wrought hard at my trade, and when I should hae been sleepin’, I wrought at my books, and I made progress in baith. Ah, sir,” said the old man, with a pathos I cannot reproduce, “naebody that hasna had to fecht for the best o’ mithers can understan’ my feelings when I saw at last that I was able to keep her and mysel’ in meat and claes respectably. I’ve had mony a pleasure in my lang life, but this was worth them a’ put thegither. Ay,” he said, and his voice became deeper and richer, “it’s grand to win a battle

when ye've been fechtin' for the through-bearin' and comfort o' an auld widow mither that ye like wi' a' your heart! For, oh, I likit my mither, and she deserved a' my likin'."

Here he broke down, his eyes filled, and, as if surprised at his own emotion, he brushed away the tears almost indignantly with his sleeve, saying, "I'm an auld man, and maybe I should think shame o' this, but I canna help being proud o' my mither."

"I think I can understand both your perseverance and your pride," I replied; "you must have had a hard struggle."

"Ay, I cam through the hards; but if I was to be laid aside noo, it wud be nae loss to my family, for they're comfortable, and could keep me weel enough; and I'm sure they wud do't."

"You were well armed for the battle," I replied, "and it was half won before you began it; for you evidently commenced life with thoroughly good principles and strong filial affection."

"Yes, I've reason to be thankfu' for a gude upbringin'. Mony a callant is ruined by bad example at home. I canna say that for mysel'. Whatever ill I hae done in my life canna be laid at my faither or mither's door. No, no; they were a dacent, honest, God-fearin' couple, and everybody respected them."

"Their example seems not to have been lost upon you; for you, too, have the respect of every one who knows you."

"Weel, I dinna ken," he replied; "everybody has enemies, and I may hae mine, but I dinna ken them—I really dinna ken them."

"Have you always lived in this village?" I asked.

"Yes; and, what's curious, I've lived under four kings, four bishops, four ministers, and four proprietors. And for mair than sixty years I've gane to the chapel at least ance a-week, and that's a walk o' eight mile there and back. That's some travelling for ye. I never was an hour ill since I was fourteen year auld."

He still looks wonderfully hale; but he says that for some time past he has felt the weight of years coming upon him.

"Sometimes," he said, "I grow dizzy. I dinna ken what it is to be the waur o' drink, but I think it maun be something like what I've felt—just sae dizzy that if I was to cross the floor and tramp on a bool (marble) I wud fa'."

Judging, however, from his haleness, one would think him not much above seventy, and even strong for that, and with probably years of good work in him yet. He expresses himself clearly, methodically, and without an atom of pedantry, though in the broadest Scotch. He is, as I have said, an Episcopalian, and says, "When it is a saint's day, and the bairns are telt no to come to the schule, for I maun gang to the chapel, if I have occasion to gang doon to the shop a wee in the morning afore chapel-time to finish some bit job, I catch mysel' lookin' roun' for the bairns, though there are nane o'

them there. Na," he continued, "I couldna do without my bairns noo at a': I canna maybe do them muckle gude, but I can do them nae harm; and as lang as I can try to do them gude, I'll no gie't up."

Thus ended my first morning with James Beattie, in February 1864, and I felt as if I had been breathing an atmosphere as fresh, bracing, and free from taint, as that which plays on mid-ocean, or on the top of Ben Nevis.

I saw him a second time in January last, and, though it was again a snowy day, I found twenty pupils present. The shoemaking and schoolwork go on as before. The awl and the hammer are as busy as ever, and his care of his bairns unabated. I had scarcely sat down before I asked for "Bell," whose "dreadfu' memory" had surprised me the previous year. I saw, from the grieved expression that passed over his countenance, that something was wrong.

"Eh, man, Bell's deed. She dee'd o' scarlatina on the last day o' September, after eighteen hours' illness. There never was a frem'd body's\* death that gied me sae muckle trouble as puir Bell's."

Evidently much affected by the loss of his favourite pupil, he went on to say, "She was insensible within an hour after she was ta'en ill, and continued that way till a short time afore she was ta'en awa', when she began to say a prayer—it was the langest ane I had learned her—and she said it frae beginning to end without a

\* A person not a relation.

mistak'. Her mither, puir body, thocht she had gotten the turn, and was growing better, but whenever the prayer was dune, she grew insensible again, and dee'd aboot an hour after. Wasna that most extraordinar? It behoved to be the Speerit o' God workin' in that bairn afore He took her to Himsel'. Ay, it'll be lang afore I forget Bell. I think I likit her amaist as if she had been my ain. Mony a time I said she was ower clever to live lang, but her death was a sair grief to me nane the less o' that. I'll never hae the like o' her again. I've a sister o' hers here. Annie M'Kenzie," he said, addressing a little girl, "stan' up, and let this gentleman see ye." Turning again to me, he said, "She has a wonderfu' memory too, but no sae gude as Bell's. She's just aboot six year auld. She has a prayer where she prays for her faither and mither, and brithers and sister. Puir Bell was the only sister she had, and I said to her ae day that she shouldna say 'sister' ony mair in her prayer; and, wud ye believe 't, sir? the tears cam rinnin' doon the creatur's cheeks in a moment. I couldna help keepin' her company. Ye wudna expect that frae ane o' her age. She has a brither, too, aboot three year auld, that will come to something. He has a forehead stickin' oot just as if your han' was laid on 't."

Jamie had made good progress during the year, and earned another sweetie easily. He has been promoted to the dignity of pointing for himself, and no longer requires the awl.

Mr Beattie seems as vigorous as when I saw him a

year ago. The only indication of greater feebleness is, that he has taken regularly to the use of a staff. He walks, however, nimbly and well; but he says the dizziness comes over him now and then, and he feels more at ease when he has a staff in his hand.

He asked me if I could not come and see him next day. I said I was sorry I could not. "I am awfu' vexed at that," he said; "this is the last day o' my eighty-first year. The morn's my eighty-second birthday, and I thocht I micht maybe never see anither, and I made up my mind to gie the bairns a treat. They're a' comin', and they get a holiday. I'm awfu' vexed ye canna come."

"I wish very much I could," I replied.

"A' the neebours," he said, "are takin' an interest in 't, and the Colonel's lady has sent me a cake to divide among the bairns—that's a sma' thing compared wi' a' her gude deeds, for she's a by-ordnar fine woman. Ye maun come up to my house, and get a bit o' the cake."

I objected that it was scarcely fair to break it before to-morrow.

"Oo ay, ye maun taste it. She'll no object to you gettin' a bit o't afore the bairns."

I yielded of course, and spent another pleasant hour with him, during which I had my first impression confirmed as to his single-hearted benevolence and altogether fine character. I shook hands with him, and as I was leaving said that I had some intention of sending

a short sketch of his labours to *Good Words*. I asked if he had any objection to his name being mentioned.

"Weel, sir," he said, "I'm real gratefu' for your kindness in coming twice to see me, and takin' notice o' me the way ye've done. It's far mair than I deserve. I dinna think the readers o' *Good Words* will care muckle about the like o' me, and I've never been fond o' makin' a show; but if ye think an article wi' my name in't wud encourage ithers in my humble way to do a' they can for the upbringin' o' puir creaturs that hae nae ither way o' gettin' education, I'll no forbid ye to do just as ye like."

"Well, then, I'll do it. Good-bye!"

"Wull ye gie me anither shake o' your han' afore ye go? I may never see ye again."

"Most willingly," I replied.

He took my hand in one of his, and, laying his other on my shoulder, said, "I'm no a man o' mony words, but I wud like ye to believe that I'm gratefu', real gratefu', for your kindness,—as gratefu' as an auld man that kens weel what kindness is can be; and I wud like ye to promise, if ye're hereabouts next year, and me spared till that time, that ye'll no gang by my door. Wull ye promise this?"

I gave the promise, and was rewarded by two or three kindly claps on the back, a hearty squeeze of the hand, and "God bless ye, and keep ye!"

The moral of James Beattie's life requires no pointing. A life that has been a discipline of goodness, and to which



32 *LESSONS FROM A SHOEMAKER'S STOOL.*

benevolence has become a necessity,—“I canna do without my bairns noo at a’, and as lang’s I can try to do them gude, I’ll no gie’t up,”—has a simple eloquence that needs no aid, and admits of no embellishment from well-balanced phrases.

May the life which has already far exceeded the allotted span be continued for years to come, to a man who has been diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord!

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